

Introduction: Thematic Synopsis

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On the fertile highland plateau of the "horn of Africa" and straddling the Great Rift Valley, ancient Abyssinia culturally bridges the Middle East and Africa. Here, the peasant society of the Amhara, despite a very primitive technology, enjoys a complex spiritual culture. Amhara culture is the subject of this report.

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Most of the material to be presented was gathered by the author during field work in Ethiopia in 1953-54, after brief, though intensive study of the Amharic language. The district of Gondar, north and northeast of Lake Tana, was chosen for intensive study because it was never conquered by the culturally more African Galla tribes, when they overran and populated most of old Abyssinia in the sixteenth-nineteenth centuries A. D. The fierce pride of the "Gondarey" has caused him to preserve the old culture more than have inhabitants of other districts.

In organizing and analyzing the data, the author's purpose has been:

1. To regard the web of activities with reference to ecology, division of labor, and standards of living.
2. To pay great attention to historical depth and local involvement with other ethnic groups. Historical considerations cannot be ignored in a study of Abyssinian culture; and consideration of ethnic relationships is, if for no other reason, necessitated by the ethnic division of labor in the

794 e.) The "Zar Language": Origin and Diffusion of the Zar Cult.
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The "zar language" is used by professional zar doctors not only during the cult services themselves, but also in daily life, e.g. in response to a greeting; whenever they wish to establish a situation of separateness. Lay Amhara believe that the "zar language" is a completely different, esoteric language. They do not recognize that [797] it is mainly deformed Amharic, plus paraphrases, and loanwords, often similarly deformed, from Arabic, Galla and other geographically neighboring languages. The zar doctors pretend that even they themselves, (mere "horses"), do not understand the zar language, but that it is the zar possessing them who speaks through them in this case, not wanting to be understood by mere humans. Some zars make more frequent use of their esoteric language, notably the "wereza", a group of minor zars.

794 Among foreign scholars who have examined the "zar language" the most notable is Dr. Leslau 103, who calls it an "argot":
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"Abstract ideas are expressed by concrete words.....

Deformation of the root, either by replacing a consonant or by lengthening of the whole root, is used.....

Some words are taboo, such as salt, the tray on which cups of coffee are served, the plant chat, the horse, etc.....

The morphology of the argot is Amharic throughout....

"addam" (man or woman possessed by a spirit) becomes "addamit"; rain is referred to as "urine of the clouds"; "tānqway", sorcerer, becomes "manqway".....

103. Leslau: An Ethiopian Argot of a People possessed by a Spirit. Africa, Vol. 19, pp. 204-212. London, July 1949.

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"Arabic loanwords include:

- Alla (h) - master; God, heaven
- Awleya - (from Arabic "awliya", plural of waliy, saint),
chief zars
- Kafir - Arabic term for the Christian Ethiopians
- Qwaha - coffee (from Arabic qahwa; Amharic uses "bunna");
coffee and perfume are taken over from Arabs, and
are essential parts of the Zar ceremony.

Galla loanwords:

- farda - Galla for horse, here meaning slave possessed by
a zar; "fārās", Amharic for horse, is taboo.
- waqiye yemmasgan - Waq is Galla for "God", yemmasgan is Am-
haric for "be praised." Total means: thank you.

There are also Woyto loanwords.

It is natural that an argot of a professional language should borrow expressions from another language with which it comes in contact....The (zar) belief might have originated with the autochthonous population of Ethiopia - the Woyto probably belong to this population - and the Amhara might have taken it over from them together with some expressions....."

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One might add to these conclusions by Dr. Leslau that in recent years Arabic loanwords are increasingly being used in the zar argot, perhaps due to the improvement of trade routes to the Sudan. Also, the poet who must compose somewhat new poetry for special occasions in the zar cult, is the prime agent for the introduction of Arabic loanwords and usages such as addressing a powerful make zar spirit as "Prophet" (in imitation of Muslim usage).

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Problems of the distribution of the "zar" and similar cults in Africa and the Middle East, such as questions as to the origin and the diffusion of the cult, are more difficult and complex.

Some linguists believe that the term "zar" is of Cushitic origin (Dr. Leslau, would seem to agree with this). This would antedate the

x 794 Hadramauti (South Arabian) colonization of Abyssinia about 2500 years
171 ago. According to this view, the term is derived from the supreme
174 divinity of the "pagan" Cushites, the God-heaven called "Jar" (pronounced djar) in Agau, the old-Cushitic language of Western Ethiopia 104.

The term for the zar ceremony, "wādaja" (lit. love feast) evidently is derived from the Amharic stem "wāddāda" (lit. he loved; to love), unless one concludes that both Amhara and Galla peoples derive the concept from an ancient, common Cushitic origin, the opinion of Dr. Michel Leiris 105.

The bulk of evidence would indicate a "Cushitic" origin for the zar cult. Indeed, the distribution of it and closely related cults is found most intensely in the geographical areas in which Cushitic is spoken.

174 Among the Cushitic-speaking Galla tribes of southern Ethiopia, Dr. Cerulli 106 found a cult of worship of similar "nature spirits", upon which the God of the conquering Abyssinians was placed later, and he infers that the same happened to the one-time sky-god of the Agau, pre-Semitic inhabitants of Cushitic-speaking northern Ethiopia. As a result, when northern Ethiopia became Christianized, the "zar", the former sky god, was demoted to a possessive spirit. Diffusion of the zar cult, Dr. Cerulli believes, was then carried by Abyssinian slaves into the Arab countries such as Egypt, the Hijaz of Arabia and Oman, where the zar cult survives under its original name, "sar" or "sar".

104. Leisau: An Ethiopian Argot of a People Possessed by a Spirit; also Cerulli; "Zar" in Encyclopedia of Islam, 1933, p. 1217

105. Leiris, M: L'Afrique Fantôme. Paris 1934, pp. 336-7, 440.

106. Cerulli, E: Etiopia Occidentale, Vol 2, p. 35

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171 It is a family or communal prayer-gathering which is accompanied by a feast of bread or roasted coffee and corn, beer or hydromel, a portion of which is offered to Waqa, the sky-god. Often a sheep is sacrificed. The term "wadaja" is also used by the Wollo and Raya tribes of Galla for their "Islamic evening prayer".

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The cult among Islamized Galla was witness by another observer:

"The Muslim sorcerers have their own 'society'. If anyone wishes to obtain a favor or draw down a curse upon his enemies, he invites several old men of the village, buys them Kat (note: the drugleaf chat, or qat) and passes the whole night with them singing, praying and cursing if it is an enemy, or blessing if it is a question of benediction. This is called making wadaja. The interested party seats himself in the middle of the kabiras who spit kat on his head, crying "yaklum" - "may it be fulfilled." (Note: compare with "yehun" of Amhara). In general, the wadaja lasts the whole night"..... 110

Southeast of Galla territory, among the Somali people, Dr. Cerulli observed "ceremonies intended to procure the incarnation of the genius to force the evil spirit to enter the bodies of initiated persons" 111

In the eastern lowland of Ethiopia, among the Afar people (also called Danakil), Dr. Theisiger observed the following:

[14]

"The 'Afar Asa Mara, who unlike the Somali do not have a wide range of dances, perform an oracle dance called the jenile. The jenile, who may be man or woman, is an ordinary member of the community who is able to fall into a trance and deliver oracles. For its performance the men form a close circle and chant and clap their hands until the jenile, who is seated nearby covered with a shamma, enters the circle. Then the dancers, without moving their feet, bend forward chanting faster and faster until the jenile in a trance answers their questions....."

"The southern Afar localize a spirit on Mount Ayelu, an isolated volcano in the south of Afar land dominating Badhu. On its summit is a rectangular walled enclosure which they visit on pilgrimage after the rains, sacrificing sheep, and pray for the fertility of their animals and success in war...." 112

- 110. Zervos A: L'Empire d'Ethiopie. 1935. p. 93
- 111. Cerulli, E: Etiopia Occidentale, Vol. 2 p. 35
- 112. Theisiger, V.G.: The Awash River and the Auesa Sultanate. Geographical Journal. Vol. 85, 1935. p. 8.

X 794
171 The same observer reports that the silver baton of the former Sultan of Aussa in this area was regarded as a magical object, enshrined, and confided to envoys on special missions. (Note Ber Alānga on zar list of Amhara).

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177 Diffusion of the zar cult from these areas to neighboring lands is the general consensus of most scholars who have occupied themselves
171 with the problem. This would center the origin of the zar cult in Ethiopia. The name itself was noted among the Islamized Somali by Cerulli:

• [W4]
"As a remainder of paganism may be regarded the ceremony of the zar, perhaps an ancient sacred dance. Natives crown in a circle and the chorus begins to sing on a special rhythm. One or many among the singers fall fainting away to the ground. The others "beat the zar" by singing and striking the hands or clattering with the feet or striking drums or kettle drums. Then the person who has fainted rises little by little from the ground, takes in his hands a dagger, and dances in the circle with the dagger drawn out, til he falls again in a faint; but immediately rises fully recovered. The zar is danced also with a burning brand instead of the dagger; among the Sab the dancer goes out of the circle, runs in the jungle nearby and then comes back showing with loud cries his dagger sprinkled with blood of the genius he has killed..." 113

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171 Diffusion of the zar cult into the Sudan from Abyssinia is concluded by Trimmingham in his recent book "Islam in the Sudan".

114 What seems to be a form of the zar cult was observed among the Swahili of coastal East Africa, where it was called "Ngoma ya Pepo", according to Skene. 114

In predominantly Islamic areas, it seems that the zar is classified as an evil spirit, similar to the jinn. This is the how orthodox Muslims are enjoined to regard all pre-Islamic "pagan" deities, according to the Quran, (Sura 37, verse 158).

113. Cerulli: Somali, Encyclop. of Islam 1908, p. 487

114. Skene: Arab and Swahili Dances. Journal of the Royal Anthropol. Instit., 1917, pp. 420-434.

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114 In the Midjaz, the zar cult was observed by the scholar Hargronje.
He noted that it was especially widely diffused among women of Mecca and other towns, the same pattern as in Egypt. The woman chief who conducted the ceremonies held the title "shekha", and attempted to ascertain the nationality of the zar by questioning him either in "vulgar Arabic" or in "zar language" known only to initiated persons.¹¹⁵ (Note the close similarity to the female doctor - dominated zar cult, and similar procedure of diagnosis and zar language as among the Amhara!).

In the Oman, Cerulli believes the zar arrived carried by slaves imported from Ethiopia. There the spirit is referred to in the plural, "ziran".¹¹⁶

In Egypt, many observers in the 19th century and up to the present time have reported zar ceremonies. Kahle, observing it there almost half a century ago, concluded that the cult had arrived in Egypt, by distribution from Abyssinia, for the following reasons:

- (1) Because the Amharic name "zar" had carried over;
- (2) because of the exorcistic character of some of the ceremonies;
- (3) because of the history of its spread in the 19th century when contact between Abyssinia and Egypt became much closer;
- (4) because the ceremonies are conducted by a woman.

He reported that this woman was called "sheikha" or "'arifa alsikka", and that she treated each spirit differently according to his place of origin, sometimes from Upper Egypt, sometimes from Lower Egypt, the Sudan, etc. In this differentiated treatment she was careful to use

115. Hargronje, S: Mekka. 1889, Vol. 2, p. 124-8

116. Cerulli: Zar. Encyclopedia of Islam, 1908, p. 1218

~~171~~ the proper melody, song, individual clothing required by the zar. The
~~171~~ chants were accompanied by small drums and by dances. A sacrifice of
~~114~~ fowl was usually offered. The ceremonies lasted sometimes many
 nights in succession. 117

In 1890, pamphlets condemning the zar cult were printed in Cairo. They complained that the ceremonies "speculate on the ignorance and stupidity of the women of Cairo"; "the dangerous spreading of this lucrative swindle and the concern this is causing noble-minded and intelligent menfolk". Letters were cited that had been written to the editors of Cairo newspapers, quoting the Quran in protest against the zar cult, and stating that the zar cult "celebrates his triumphs especially in the houses of the richest, socially most prominent Turkish families residing in Cairo". One modern-educated, sophisticated and worried Egyptian even sent his wife to a zar ceremony to study the details of it, at the suggestion of a German scholar named Vollers, who then published a brief description in the original Arabic. In the cult, the term "minzar" was used to indicate a woman possessed by the zar, and the term was increasingly used for epileptic attacks, the sufferers of which were being taken to the zar ceremonies. 118

It would be interesting to make a study of the influence of the zar cult on Islamic societies, perhaps along the lines indicated in Zwemer's "Influence of Animism on Islam" 119. Such a study would be obverse to Joseph Greenberg's "Influence of Islam on a Sudanese Religion". 120

117. Kahle, Paul: Zar Beschwörungen in Egypten. Der Islam, III, 1912, p. 1-41, 189-190.
118. Lihman, Enno: Arabische Geisterbeschwörungen Aus Egypten (Zar). Leipzig, 1950.
118. Vollers, Karl: Noch einmal der Zar. Zeitschrift Deutsch. Morgenl. Ges, 45, Leipzig, 1891, pp. 343-351
- Walker, J: Folk Medicine in Modern Egypt. London 1934, p. 64-7
119. Zwemer, S.M.: The Influence of Animism on Islam. 1920.
120. Greenberg, J.: Influence of Islam on a Sudanese Religion. New York, 1947

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ETHIOPIAN HIGHLANDS

W. E. D. ALLEN

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114 THIS lecture does not pretend to be a serious study of any geographical aspect of Ethiopia. It is rather a record of impressions gained during a year spent in Ethiopia in various jobs ranging from the care of a park of derelict mules to that of Intelligence Officer to the newly formed Ethiopian Army.

Unluckily I was posted away from Addis Ababa at short notice, and my reference books in Italian and Italian photographs of ethnological interest which I had collected should now be in Nairobi, if they have not been lost. Many of the photographs used as illustrations were taken in the field by Captain Mark Pilkington, the Life Guards, a very gallant officer who distinguished himself in the guerrilla fighting round Lake Tana and who was killed in action in Libya, just two months ago.

133 With the possible exception of parts of the Shankalla wilderness, which is the Abyssinian extension of the Sudan plain between the western bend of the Blue Nile and the Escarpment, it cannot be said that any large areas of the Ethiopian Empire had remained unvisited by Europeans prior to the Italian War of 1935-36 and the campaign of 1941. I have however come across no account of the remarkable massifs of Dungwur and Belaia which rise out of the Shankalla plain to the east of the Escarpment. On the tableland of Belaia, well within the nominal Italian frontier, an advance base for the supply of the Patriot forces was established in January 1941 and in February the Emperor set up his headquarters there.

[137] These twin mountain masses rise out of the Shankalla plain to an altitude of about 7000 feet above sea-level. They are covered with rich forests and watered by fast-running streams. Dungwur was uninhabited and visited [361] only from time to time by stray bands of Abyssinian hunters. But there are flourishing villages and ancient churches on Belaia. It was a weird experience to reach these strange islands of luxuriating nature after the long camel trek across the burnt-out Shankalla wilderness. From a day's march away we

186 The great weakness of the Ethiopians, their inveterate regionalism, arises, like other aspects of their life and history, from the peculiar conditions of their geography. The four historic Kingdoms of Tigray and Amhara, Shoa and Gojjam, cover the plateaux divided by the canyons of the Blue Nile and the Takkaze and their lateral rifts. During four months of the year, the season of the Great Rains between July and October, Gojjam is entirely cut off from Shoa and Amhara by the floods of the Blue Nile. Only recently has the construction of the bridge over the Blue Nile at Shafartak, a major engineering undertaking, made continuous contact possible. The violent regionalism of the Gojjam has been a disastrous factor in internal Ethiopian history which will doubtless tend to decline with the modern development of communications.

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195 The Gojjam, scene of the guerrilla campaign of 1941, has been described by Major Cheesman, formerly H.B.M. Consul in Dangila, in several articles in the Society's *Journal*, and in his standard work on the province, 'Lake Tana and the Blue Nile.' Cheesman's work was in fact the basis of knowledge which made practical the organization of the expedition to reinforce the Patriot groups which were in the field against the Italians at the moment when Italy declared war on Britain. His exploration of the gap up the Escarpment, the fruit of an arduous excursion described in his book, enabled the Frontier Battalion of the Sudan Defence Force with their camel convoys of supplies and arms to make a rapid deployment on to the Escarpment.

175 The least-known part of the Gojjam province is probably the region of the Choké Mountains which rise to the north of Debra Markos. In an effort to hold down this very wild bit of country the Italians had built forts at Mota and other points and a passable dirt road had been constructed linking Debra Markos via Mota with Bahrdar—the Italian strong point at the southern tip of Lake Tana. After the capture of Debra Markos in April 1941, it proved necessary to make contact with the small group of Patriots and one company of Sudanese with some British officers and non-commissioned officers who were containing the very considerable Italian force still in the field round the south-east shore of Lake Tana. At Debra Markos we were very short of troops. Further, scarcity of mules made it necessary to try the experiment of taking camels over the pass which runs under the peaks of Choké at an altitude indicated on Italian maps at rather over 13,000 feet. Kit had to be limited to one ground-sheet and one blanket each for all ranks and the plain-bred Sudanese, many of whom were already lame with jiggers, suffered from cold and mountain-sickness particularly in the hail blizzard which struck the force on the bare ridge of the Choké Pass. Nevertheless this one company of Sudanese covered the 70 odd miles in just under three days, and Colonel Boustead bluffed the Italian battalion in Mota into surrender within forty-eight hours of opening fire with his solitary mortar.

144 I was following along in the rear with the camel *hamlia* and on reaching base camp in front of Mota was met with orders to about turn and take the animals back to Debra Markos. I thus crossed the Choké Mountains twice in one week. With amateur medical and veterinary duties and a driving mist at the higher altitudes alternating with rain, sleet, and hail, I had little opportunity for geographical observation.

174 travellers in the region of the southern lakes.¹ Other and earlier cultures may well have percolated into the Highland by the same routes along the ridges which are established for the mediaeval Copto-Ethiopian culture.

550 I am afraid I have put before the Society some rather hazardous lines of inquiry, with implications which necessarily impose a great deal of comparative study before they can be established or disproved. My excuse in these days when no one has the leisure to pursue exacting studies is that it is worth putting on record lines of inquiry which some of us may be able to turn to at a later date.

All photographs, unless acknowledged, were taken by the late Captain Mark Pilkington.

DISCUSSION

114 Before the paper the PRESIDENT (the Rt. Hon. Sir GEORGE CLERK) said: Captain Allen has been well known to us in the past as an authority on Georgia and as the author of an excellent history of the Ukraine. Military duty took him to Ethiopia for the operations which restored the Emperor Haile Selassie to his throne and capital—operations in which others of our Fellows, particularly Colonel Orde Wingate, Major Hugh Boustead, and Mr. Wilfred Thesiger, took a prominent part. Some day when the war is over I hope that the story of the Abyssinian campaign will come out, because not only is it in many ways a fantastic story, but it makes a very fine chapter in our annals.

It has been a little difficult for Captain Allen to prepare his paper for this evening, first of all because nearly all his photographs were left behind in Africa, and secondly, because his military duties have given him very little time to get his paper into shape. We look forward to hearing the impressions which the country and people of the Ethiopian Highlands have made upon him in the course of his military duties.

Captain Allen then read the paper printed above

137 The PRESIDENT: The lecture this evening has stirred memories of forty years ago. The lecturer talked about those miles of red-hot poker. I have always held that if you give Nature a chance she is the best gardener in the world. I came once over a plateau in Abyssinia, a bit of waste country where no white man had ever been before, and there I found a great sheet of red-hot poker and rosemary: the masses of orange-scarlet flowers backed by the grey-mauve of the rosemary were wonderfully beautiful. It finished in a sort of marsh in which there were immense stretches of white and scarlet arum lilies, inconceivably spectacular.

600 The lecturer has described the good manners and charm of the Shoon Abyssinians, but it is true that they are very quick to take offence as well as to show affection; they are very volatile. What he said about the Tigraians was also true; they are the tough northerners, more dependable, but not so easy to get on with. I will give you an instance of the funny though rather charming ways of the Abyssinians. Forty years ago I was on a certain expedition with a so-called Abyssinian army: two thousand scallywags, with two thousand small boys to carry their rifles, and two thousand unfortunate second wives to carry their food. We descended the escarpment to the west, and came into populated country. The Abyssinian soldiers were living on the country, and here they started to be extremely tiresome. I had to chase them off the inhabitants and

¹ See 'Africa Orientale,' Italiana Guida, published by Touring Club Italiana, 1939.

THE SHOAN PLATEAU AND ITS PEOPLE: AN ESSAY IN LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

D. R. BUXTON

114 DURING THE FIFTEEN months from October 1946 to January 1948, I was working in an educational centre near Debra Berhan, an important market town and district headquarters 80 miles north-east of Addis Ababa on the Asmara road. The district was historically interesting as the hub of the old kingdom of Shoa, and it was still an important centre of Amhara population. Moreover I soon found that it contained some very remarkable topographical features. I therefore decided to devote my leisure to a detailed study of the area, which I expected to help in my educational work and also to furnish (as such studies had never, as far as I knew, been made in Ethiopia) material of some geographical interest and novelty. Unfortunately I had to leave the district before finishing what I had intended to do. But I was able to complete a large-scale compass-survey covering about a hundred square miles, working out from the village of Tebasse where I lived. This paper deals chiefly with the area shown on the map, and its Amhara population. Something will be said of the traditional ways of these people, but the formidable problems of the present day are left out of account.

The map was made, on the scale of 1: 50,000, entirely by triangulation with the prismatic compass based on points along a 5-mile section of the Italian motor-road, which runs in straight lines and is conveniently marked out with stones at 50-metre intervals. The first stage was to cover the area with a sufficient number of principal fixed points, which were mostly conspicuous trees and hill-tops. The second stage, which occupied the week-end walks of nearly twelve months, was to follow all the principal mule-tracks and streams, and all the edges of the gorges, fixing points at intervals by resection; at the same time I tried to fix all the churches accurately, but a few were missed. A comprehensive framework was thus built up, all plotting being done at home. Finally I walked all over the area again, taking with me tracings of the framework on which the remaining detail required—hill-slopes, habitations, etc.—was inserted by eye. The method gave most satisfactory results, for the area was small (only about ten miles by eleven) and the base-line relatively very long. The only serious difficulty—bewildering until I realized its cause—was the falsification of compass readings (occasionally by as much as 15°) by magnetic rocks. One could sometimes avoid this by climbing into a tree, but bearings simply could not be taken from some points which would otherwise have been most useful.

128 To indicate relief I decided to use hachures rather than form-lines, real contouring being out of the question with the means, and in the time, at my disposal. The hachures seem to me to give a true impression to the eye of the peculiar character of this piece of country, for they bring out the contrast between the relatively slight relief of the plateau and the sudden, sensational depths of the cliff-bound gorges.

[p. 157]

538 When miffed, or in temporary disgrace, he would request permission to return to his native
539 Gondar. Subsequently he would send excuse after excuse to the capital for refusing to go
back there, until he felt that he had been sufficiently coaxed to assuage his pride as a
scholar and that further hesitation might result in serious difficulties, even for him. Em-
press Taitu was a very powerful figure and often protected him when he had gone too far
with Emperor Menelik (her fifth husband).

● [114] Although the following stories have no titles except "Story of Aläqa Gäbre-Hanna,"
I have given them names to point up the major emphasis. This material was gathered
orally from Amharic-speaking peasants and nobles in the Gondar region (during my field
trip to that area in 1953-54 on a grant from the Ford Foundation).

539 *The Wit And The Nitwit.* AG-H didn't like the rumor going around that he had become a
snob, that he didn't greet common people politely any more. One day, accompanied by his usual
retinue of friends and admirers, he was greeted effusively with deep bows by a certain donkey-
driver who was known as none too bright. In return, to quash the nasty rumors, AG-H bowed
just as deeply, from the hips, instead of the usual nod from one of his station in life. But, unable
[576] to resist the temptation for a witicism, he greeted the donkey-driver with the words "Endä: ad-
derachuk? 'How are ye?'"

Unaware that the second person plural had been used, the proud donkey-driver was soon
boasting at the nearest barley-beer hut of the honor he had received. His cronies made him repeat
the exact remark, suspecting some twist. They quickly convinced the poor fool that the greeting
had included him in the same class with his donkeys, and the simpleton slunk away in shame.

Another version of the story: But the donkey-driver was, after all, a proud Amhara. Realizing
that he had been made a fool of, he took his walking stick, went to the house of AG-H, and beat
him unmercifully. This was one time that his wit struck back at him.

Good Eating Comes First. Though greatly honored at the court of Emperor Menelik in newly-
built Addis Ababa, AG-H was once again homesick for his native Gondar. Finally, he was granted
permission for a leave home.

He promptly organized his small caravan and was about to mount his mule when he noticed
two fat cows being taken to slaughter. Thinking of the long trip ahead without fresh beef, he
decided to wait around and obtain a good share of the meat which was being rapidly parcelled
out. The meat had to be washed down with a huge jugful of barley-beer and honey-mead, and so
the day passed with pleasant feasting. It was late afternoon when it happened that Emperor Mene-
lik came riding by. Surprised to see the homesick scholar still in the capital, the Emperor ad-
dressed him: "I gave you permission to go, and you are still here?"

But, as usual, his wit did not fail AG-H. "Lam gäb 'the cows were entering,' your Majesty,"
he replied. (The phrase is used to indicate dusk, when the cows come home, too late to start on
a trip. The cows had indeed "entered," i.e., into the stomach of AG-H; and no one could accuse
him later of having told a lie to the Emperor.)

Pride Of A Man From Gondar Province. The next time AG-H became homesick occurred in
the middle of the long Lenten fast. The housewives of Gondar were famous for their many spicy
recipes for cooking fish in that season, and when AG-H thought of these his mouth watered and
nothing pleased him any more in Shoa province.

One day he was invited to dine at the house of a noble of Shoa. The odor of fish being cooked
attracted him to the cooking hut. It seemed to him that the woman cook had not properly cleaned
the fish and had added too much water. He began to moan and groan.

"What's the matter?" asked his host.

Pointing to the watery fish stew, AG-H replied: "The fish are better off than I. They are in
their native state, but I am so far from mine!"

Safety From Robbers. Once again the long rainy season was over, the rivers had receded, and
the trails were passable again. AG-H managed to obtain a generous purse of Maria-Theresa
thalers from the Empress and was on his perennial way back to Gondar.

He was just emerging from the lowland valley of the Abbai (Blue Nile) to climb up the es-
carpment of the dangerous province of Gojjam, which he had to traverse. Suddenly one of his
companions spotted a band of robbers waiting at the top of the upland trail.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: LAND
TENURE AND TRIBUTE

THE GABAR

It is impossible to go any further with this discussion of provincial administration without some understanding of the Ethiopian methods of land tenure. The three strands, administration, tribute, and tenure, were closely twisted together and with them the fourth strand of military service, which we have already endeavoured to study separately. Unfortunately the whole subject is extremely complex. A few investigations have been made especially by Italian scholars, whose work has been mainly in the old Tigré province, part of which became Eritrea, but, as there are very wide varieties even within the northern provinces, seeming inconsistencies occur between the authorities.¹ The situation was at least as intricate as in early medieval England while

¹ Among the chief authorities upon this subject are:

1. P. Soleillet, *Voyages en Ethiopie*, Rouen, 1886.
2. E. de Felcourt, *L'Abyssinie*, Paris, 1911.
3. Rossini.
4. Cerulli.
5. Guèbrè Sellassié, especially Appendix xi by M. de Coppet, 'Landed Property in Shoa'.
6. A. Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, Bologna, 1935.
7. de Castro, *L'Etiopia*.
8. G. P. Veroli, *Caratteri generali dell'economica dell'Impero*, Rome, 1937.
9. V. L. Grottanelli, *Missione di Studi al Lago Tana*, 2 vols., Rome, 1939.
10. J. Kalmer, 'The Return of Haile Selassié', *Contemporary Review*, vol. 159, pp. 290-4.
11. L. Meri, *Problema fondiario*, Rivista delle Colonie, Rome, 1937.

(For nos. 3, 4, and 5, see list of abbreviated references.)

In addition to these modern authors who give special consideration to land tenure, nearly all the travellers have something to say of the subject. While use has been made of these authorities, some of the information in this and the next chapter is based upon evidence collected directly from Ethiopians by F. de Halpert.

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

651 had been removed, leaving the heads of villages and districts in direct
661 contact with the Italian resident.

• 114 Our third example comes from Eritrea. No excuse is needed for this excursion beyond the present borders of Ethiopia, since the Eritrean plateau was until fifty years ago a part, and one of the oldest parts, of the Ethiopian state, and this region may again revert to its former status. In addition, however, we have the great advantage that Dr. Nadel, an anthropologist of experience and authority, has had the opportunity in this region under the British military administration to make a thorough investigation of a land tenure closely resembling that of northern Ethiopia.¹

621 On the Eritrean plateau the most characteristic unit was the *enda*, a
614 number of families which claimed to have descended from a single ancestor. This group was not static; it might decline or be dispersed, or it might thrive and reach a size when it became necessary to break up and form new *endas*. It was not an administrative unit, but in certain matters it acted as a unity through meetings of its elders. The administrative unit, the village, generally covered several *endas*, though these may have all descended from a parent *enda*. The village unit might also cut across *endas*.

423 Above the village administrations, in the days before the Italian
651 conquest, came the hierarchy of the Emperor, his governors and deputy
[631] governors. These were often strangers from the south though local chiefs might be promoted to imperial positions. The imperial taxation had to be delivered to these officers, and the Emperor might arbitrarily cut out estates in *gult* for their support, or for that of monasteries or colonies of soldiers posted in these outlying regions to support the Emperor's power.

423 These rights may be regarded as extraneous to the underlying customary tenures which are divided by Dr. Nadel into three, ownership by the individual (which generally meant the individual family); by the kindred, or *enda*, and by the village. The first two types of ownership might, owing to the blurring of the edges between the three groups by growth or decline, shade off into each other.

In his discussion of family ownership Dr. Nadel gives us an authoritative definition of *resti*, which may cover ownership ranging from that of an individual to that of a large kinship group. This tenure was held by the people to be the most fundamental and sacred, and its characteristics were firstly its relative absoluteness; secondly its hereditary nature,

¹ Nadel, S. F., 'Land Tenure on the Eritrean Plateau', *Africa*, vol. 16, nos. 1 and 2, pp. 1-22, 99-109. The succeeding pages are closely based on this concise report.

114 ETHIOPIA has attracted travelers from the earliest days of African exploration. Disease often played an important rôle in the success or failure of such travelers, and a considerable amount of information with regard to nosography may be gathered from their writings. As early as 1855 Meyer-Ahrens published a nosography of Ethiopia based on the information gleaned from travel books then available, and much of this information is still of considerable importance. Other early attempts at a nosography of this region, not covered by Meyer-Ahrens, may be mentioned: Courbon's (1861) thesis, which is very superficial, and Blanc's *Medical History of a Journey in Abyssinia* (1869). Blanc was attached as physician to the expedition sent to relieve a British Consul kept prisoner by King Theodore. Theodore had sent a letter to Queen Victoria and another to Napoleon III asking for an embassy. When both letters were ignored, all Europeans in Ethiopia were imprisoned in 1866. Blanc, although imprisoned for two years, had opportunity to act as physician to Theodore and other important Ethiopians and has given a very interesting, although under the circumstances quite naturally a somewhat prejudiced, account of diseases and customs among the Ethiopians.

175 In 1889 Menelik proclaimed himself Emperor of Ethiopia. The years that followed brought Ethiopia into bitter conflict with Italy. A treaty was signed between the two countries at Ucciali in 1889, and Menelik's cousin, Ras Makonnen, father of the present Emperor, was sent on a mission to Rome to obtain a loan for which the whole province of Harar was offered as security. Soon difficulties broke out again and in 1894 Menelik denounced the treaty of

[p. 710A]

744 during the Italian occupation, 1936 to 1941. The first year of the "conquest" was considered "a period of orientation and preparation." Demobilization of the Italian military sanitary service was carried out, while the civilian organization had not as yet been completed.

743 In the whole of East Africa, the Italians had a medical staff of approximately 1,000 men. The provinces comprising Italian East Africa were: (1) Eritrea somewhat larger than before, (2) Somalia, (3) Shoa, (4) Harar, (5) Amara, and (6) Galla and Sidamo. The Italians had the problem of making the country safe for their own people. A large number of hospitals, dispensaries and mobile sanitary units were set up. The plan called for a large (at least 600 beds) regional hospital in each of the six regions. None of the regional hospitals in Ethiopia were finished, but some, like the one in the Galla Sidamo region (Jimma), were already partly in use at the time of the Italian defeat. The Italians have made much capital out of the "civilizing effort in the field of medicine." It is true that the figures for treatment of sick persons supplied by Italian medical authorities, indicate a great deal of interest in the native population. This interest must, however, be taken with a grain of salt on the basis of actual findings on the spot. For example, it is indicated almost constantly that a very much larger number of natives received hospital treatment than did Italians. When the U. S. Technical Project examined the hospital in Jimma, it was, however, discovered that, while a grandiose hospital had been under development for the Italians, no real hospital existed for the Ethiopians, apart from some temporary, insanitary buildings. These barracks carried a magnificent name and figured with a large number of beds for natives in the Italian reports, but the obvious fact was that essentially nothing had been done for the native population.

114 • Much nosological work was prepared by the Italians in the different regions of

[p. 712 A]

- 114 Ethiopia. Eritrea and especially Italian Somaliland had been used by the School of Tropical Medicine in Bologna as a study ground, and to this was now added the much more varied and interesting field of Ethiopian nosography. The Italian studies, amounting to over 500, have been carefully analyzed by the U. S. Technical Project in Ethiopia. With few exceptions, especially in the field of malariology, the Italian work was careless, inexact, with a tendency to unwarranted generalizations.

While a number of excellent Italian physicians worked in East Africa, it would seem that, on the whole, publication was not encouraged unless it would further the Fascist cause. It would thus not be justified to judge Italian medical work here solely on the writings of the more politically minded party members. It does, however, remain a fact that, considering the very large group of medical men who worked in Ethiopia for over five years, we have precious little exact medical information about this country.

- 744 Today, the medical services of Ethiopia
159 are being reorganized. The Government is attempting to obtain the necessary medical personnel, build hospitals and carry out public health programs. It is still too early to judge any achievements. The problems are many and the Ethiopian Government is handicapped through the complete lack of native Ethiopian physicians. Such physicians will not be available for at least another decade.

- 114 During and after World War II, military authorities had reason to take an interest in Ethiopian nosography and a number of articles were published in this field; prominent among these was Manson-Bahr's "The Prevalent Diseases of Italian East Africa" (1941). The U. S. Technical Project had opportunity to make a number of its own studies and much of the following information is based on this work.

- 164 If one may speak of social diseases in the sense of diseases of immediate impor-

ix / Preface

volve the sympathetic analysis of problems created by the great transition to |21| modernity.

In the case of Ethiopia the temptation is particularly compelling. The literature on Ethiopia is conspicuous for the absence of thoughtful social analysis. With few exceptions it is divided between the esoteric treatises of specialists and the insipid blandishments of partisans.* I have therefore offered certain analyses and suggestions regarding Ethiopia's dilemmas, not on the presumption that they are in every case the most sound, but with the aim of raising questions and formulating issues in public which heretofore have been politely overlooked or furtively concealed, or of promoting their discussion in a more exploratory manner than has previously been the practice. (114)

In so doing I trust that my words will not be taken as the preachings of an omniscient Westerner to a backward congregation. On the contrary, I am fully aware that the problems faced by Ethiopia today are simply variants of the basic problems faced by all of us throughout the world, problems which stem from the accelerated rate of historic change in our time and the persisting difficulties of institutionalizing a rational civilization in any human society. If I have sought to throw light on the dilemmas facing Ethiopians, it has been in part with the end of providing a mirror against which the dilemmas of Western societies might also be viewed.

For this and other reasons, our discussion touches now and then on matters of more universal concern. I have done this by means of allusion either to the comparable experience of other societies or to more abstract ways of conceptualizing the phenomena under consideration. Such references to comparative sociology or social theory represent the intrusion, beyond aesthetic interest and practical concern, of a purely intellectual impulse. I have, in other words, permitted myself to linger awhile with certain questions which emerged in the course of my work on Ethiopia—such as the nature of ambiguity, the functions of oral literature, or the concept of individualism—for their intrinsic theoretic interest.

In a way, this type of digression, more than any specific proposals set forth herein, embodies the chief message I would wish to convey to those now shaping the fate of developing nations. The upheavals of our time do not only confront us with dilemmas of action and moral emergencies; they and the work of scholars who study them also afford great opportunity for the cultivation of those faculties of "sociological imagination" and "sociological sensibility" which can enrich our lives as we live them, here and now, from day to day. To readers who may be offended by parts of this book which may seem critical, I can only say that to be modern means—for all of us—to be joined to

* The chief exception is Margery Perham's book, *The Government of Ethiopia*, which remains far and away the best general introduction to contemporary Ethiopian society.

56 / WAX & GOLD

121 other hand, has hitherto been impeded by two characteristics of humanistic
 * 565 and social studies. The historian's view has been limited by his reliance on
 written records that deal chiefly with the activities of men of power and the
 conceptions of literati. The ethnographer or traveler who tries to give the
 peasantry its due has usually concentrated on the more evident and accessible
 facts of custom—activities related to work, play, kinship, and ritual. The
 peasant's inner feelings and notions have perforce been neglected.²

In default of a widely disseminated sensibility to peasant realities, modern-
 izing Ethiopians have thus come to view the peasantry in terms of misleading
 stereotypes: either romantically, as an embodiment of virtue, awaiting only
 proper leadership to realize their suppressed aspirations for freedom, justice,
 and progress; or else as inhabitants of a dark hinterland, barbarous in custom
 and blind with superstition. In this chapter we shall attempt a more empirical
 [128] account of one part of the Ethiopian peasant's world—that of the Amhara—
 with particular emphasis on the beliefs and values of the peasant himself. Our
 • [114] account is based on seven months of residence among the Amhara peasantry,
 [12] using the observational techniques of participant observation, discreet ques-
 tioning, analysis of folk expressions, and Thematic Apperception Tests
 (TAT).³

THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING
 OF PEASANT LIFE

* 565
 592 The homestead is the basic ecological and social unit of the Amhara
 [342] peasantry. The average homestead consists of from one to six small round
 [343] structures, built of wattle (or stone, as in Manz) and capped with conical
 thatched roofs. A well-equipped homestead will have one building for eating
 and sleeping, one for animals, one for grain storage, one as a kitchen, and one
 for entertaining guests; though for many peasants all these functions are
 served by a single large building. The homestead is normally located on land
 [423] worked by the peasant. While most peasants plow land whose use is theirs by
 [427] hereditary right (*riṣṣ*), some are tenants on estates owned by the king, lords,
 monasteries, or older relatives.

The smallest homesteads consist simply of husband, wife, and unmarried
 children. Sometimes a young married son will remain within the family home
 and, much less frequently, a young married daughter. Occasionally an older
 relative will be sustained there, or a younger relative will be brought up
 there. One or more servants—slaves, until a generation ago—complete the
 [556] household. The wealthier the peasant, the more relatives and servants will be
 found in the homestead.

621 At times hamlets will be formed by the clustering of households of a number
 602 of married brothers or other kin. These tend to have a patriarchal cast; if the
 [592] father is no longer living, the oldest male relative usually assumes jurisdiction
 for the affairs of the hamlet. But the nucleated village, contrary to erroneous

290 / Notes to Pages 33-42

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deal with this matter present different pictures, however. Blättēngētā Heruy and Guèbrē Sellassié telescope the genealogy: Yā'qob—Segew Qāl—Nagāssi. Tādassa Za-Wāldē, on the other hand, leaves the question open; he identifies Segew Qāl as one of Yā'qob's sons, and refers to Nagāssi as father of the Shoan Dynasty, but affirms nothing concerning a connection between Segew Qāl and Nagāssi.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that none of these versions was reported to European travelers in the nineteenth century prior to the ascendance of Menelik. According to information given Major Harris by Shoan informants in the 1840's, Nagāssi inherited royal blood through his mother, who was said to be a granddaughter of "a daughter of the House of Solomon." Four decades later Soleillet was told still another story, namely, that "the kings of Shoa are now of the House of David, heirs of Solomon, cousins of Christ" not through Nagāssi, but by virtue of the marriage of his great-great-grandson, Asfā Wassan, to a relative of the imperial family at Gondar. Cecchi, finally, mentions none of these legitimizing affiliations.

- 113 25. Heruy manuscript, p. 19.
 26. The latter version is given by Cecchi.
 27. James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (5 vols.; London, 1790), III, 255-56.
 28. Cecchi, *op. cit.*, I, 241.
 29. Takla Tsādeq, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
 30. Harris, *op. cit.*, III, 9.
 31. Takla Tsādeq, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
 32. Harris, *op. cit.*, III, 12.
 33. Isenberg and Krapf, *op. cit.*, p. 301. Heruy's account of the rebellion of Matakō is considerably different. We are following Harris and Krapf here since they were virtually contemporaneous with the events, and would have no particular reason not to record them faithfully.
 34. Isenberg and Krapf, *op. cit.*, p. 302.
 35. Harris, *op. cit.*, II, 133.
 36. Arnauld d'Abbadie, *Douze ans de séjour dans la Haute-Éthiopie* (Paris, 1868), p. 173.
 [114] 37. The word "Manz" (or "Manzēh"), according to local clergy, stems from a Ge'ez expression which means "land on which Christ's blood was sprinkled."
 38. Ludolphus, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
 39. The architecture and layout of the imperial compound are described in Monti della Corte, *I castelli di Gondar* (Rome: Società Italiana Arti Grafiche, 1938).
 40. On the role of the *abuna*, cf. below, chap. v.
 41. C. Poncet, "A Voyage to Ethiopia," *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1949), p. 61.
 42. This is what has been called an orthogenetic, as distinguished from a heterogenetic, pattern of cultural development. Cf. Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, III, No. 1, 53-73.

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

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Haile Selassie I University.

This study would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Imperial Ethiopian Government. In particular, I would like to thank the administration of Haile Selassie I University.

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Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Roberta, for her assistance during both fieldwork and the preparation of this dissertation.

PREFACE

121

This dissertation describes the medical beliefs and practices of an Amhara population of northwestern Ethiopia. The field research upon which it is based was conducted from January to December, 1966, in the highland area of Begemder province that extends from Gorgora, on the northern shore of Lake Tana, to Debark, overlooking the Takassie valley (see Map 3). This region is occupied by four ethnic groups, the Amhara, Abyssinian Muslims, Falasha (Abyssinian Jews), and Agaw (former pagans). All are racially indistinguishable from one another, and speak a common language, Amharic. North of the Takassie River live the Tigre, a people closely related to the Amhara and, like the latter, Coptic Christians.

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The Amhara, who are the most numerous of Begemder's peoples, also inhabit much of the highland plateau extending to the south, into Gojam and Shoa provinces, and to the east, into Wollo province. Most Amhara are rural folk who practice a mixed agricultural economy, growing grains and pulses; raising sheep, goats, and cattle. The Amhara countryside is divided into parishes. A parish is composed of several hamlets whose residents live on dispersed homesteads, and share important social and economic ties through their parish's church. In addition to these rural folk, Amhara constitute a majority among the townspeople of highland Begemder.

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000 townspeople of highland Begemder.

632 Field research was concentrated in the vicinity of
• 114 Gondar, the largest of the province's towns, and imperial
capital during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

[874] Today, it is the provincial capital and an important ec-
[346] clesiastical center, housing several famous churches and
* [756] renowned ecclesiastical academies. The town is also the
home of many of the province's most famous healers. Ex-
tended research was also conducted in the Woggera region
north of Gondar, in the rural hamlets discussed in Chap-
121 ter Three. The division of research efforts between
town and countryside reflects the important urban and
rural aspects of Amhara medical practices with regard to
the distribution of practitioners.

Through observation and inquiry, this field research
sought, first, to elicit a description of the social and
natural environments in which Amhara perceive pathogenic,
prophylactic, diagnostic, and therapeutic forces to oper-
ate. A second concern was to examine how Amhara select
elements from these environments, and arrange them into
etiologies with which to explain particular disease epi-
sodes. On the one hand, this meant collecting abstract,
conscious etiological models used by Amhara; on the other
hand, it meant recognizing etiologies that are construc-
ted pragmatically and piecemeal, in the course of pro-
phylactic and therapeutic failures and successes. Fi-

121 nally, data were gathered relating to the modes of acquiring, exercising, validating, and conserving powers of prophylaxis, diagnosis, and therapy. Here, as in the other areas of data gathering, a necessary distinction was made between the perceptions of practitioners and those of their clients.

*793 While the secular medical traditions of Ethiopia
869 are exclusively oral, powerful cleric healers known as
75 debteras have traditionally employed diagnostic, prophylactic, and therapeutic texts written in Ge'ez, the
197 language of the Church, and in the vernacular. Numerous
539 debtera texts have been collected in the libraries of Europe and the United States, and valuable translations, most notably by Marcel Griaule, Deborah Lifchitz, and Stefan Strelcyn, have been published. These published translations, together with translations made in the field with the assistance of clerics, have been utilized in the writing of those sections of Chapter Four dealing with the debtera's medical texts.

121 Although the focus of this dissertation is limited
171 to the region in which field research was conducted, it should not be overlooked that the Amhara share important cultural affinities with peoples, now largely Islamic, occupying lands extending from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.